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# PSC 534.01: Political Theory Seminar - Negative and Positive Freedom

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Department of Political Science

Political Science 534  
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Spring 1998  
Dr. Grey

**Political Theory Seminar:  
Negative & Positive Freedom**

*"The world freedom is incompletely descriptive. To understand what freedom means, we must know what it is —freedom from or freedom for." Maurice Cranston.*

Course Description:

Classical and contemporary political philosophers often speak of *freedom*, (some even make a distinction between liberty and freedom.) But what exactly does freedom mean? There is considerable debate among theorists, and especially among the writers we will examine this semester over whether freedom or "liberty" should be treated as an *end* (good for its own sake) or a *means* (to other human ends or values.) This seminar we will examine both forms of freedom, considering how the embrace of negative or positive freedom can influence a thinker's position on what properly belongs to the public verses the private, the relationship between society's good and the individual's interests, as well as what he/she believes are the sources of oppression and its remedy.

Course Objectives: after successfully completing the course work, the student should be able to:

1. Distinguish between negative and positive freedom, and recognize how this framework of analysis has influenced contemporary political discourse.
2. Develop concise, analytic essays on the assigned contemporary theorists. Specifically with regards to an analytic perspective, the student will consider their own position with respect to different approaches to studying political theory (i.e. what consequences follow if one emphasizes text or context when studying political theory.)
3. Evaluate a political theory in terms of its analytic, empirical, and normative strengths and/or weaknesses.

Course Grading:

PS 534 will be taught as a seminar. Short essays (6-7 per student) will be assigned and critiqued in class (55% of course grade.) Class participation (20% of course grade) will require each student to be prepared with reading assignments and contribute to class discussions. Students will be expected to assess the merits and weaknesses of their colleague's essays. (To give us time to prepare questions, copies of the essay must be distributed the *Friday* before you are scheduled to orally present it.) Late essays will not be accepted. The final (25% of course grade) will be a take-home essay examination.

### Required Tests:

Hayek, *Road to Serfdom* ; selections from *The Constitution of Liberty* (handout)  
T.H. Green, "Liberal Legislation & Freedom of Contract" (handout)  
Young, *The Rise of the Meritocracy*  
Krutch, *The Modern Temper*  
Niebuhr, *The Children of Light & The Children of Darkness*  
Erich Fromm, *Escape From Freedom; The Sane Society*  
Arendt, *The Human Condition*  
Berlin, *Essays on Liberty*  
Short assigned readings will be added.

February 2nd

Two Concepts of Liberty

Read: Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*;

Essays (\*due 2/2 by 1pm): What form of liberty, positive or negative, does Hayek embrace and why? What are the problems if one form of liberty is preferred over the other?

### Recommended Readings:

Sunstein, "The Road to Serfdom," *The New Republic*, 20 October 1997  
Macfarlane, "On Two Concepts of Liberty, *Political Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1 Fall 1966  
Cranston, M. *Freedom*  
Gray, J. "The Road From Serfdom," *National Review*, 27 April 1992  
Hazlett, T. "The Road From Serfdom: An Interview with F.A. Hayek, *Reason*, July 1992  
Kumar, A. "F.A. Hayek: Economics and Politics," *Indian Journal of Political Science*, Jan. 1992  
Lundstrom, M. "Is Anti-Rationalism Rational? The Case of F.A. Hayek," *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 1992  
Miller, D. "F.A. Hayek: Dogmatic Skeptic," *Dissent*, Summer 1994  
Stavropoulos, P. "Liberal Dilemmas, Conservative Problems. . ." *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Nov. 1993

February 9th

Theories of Liberty & Public Policy/Law

Read: Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (handout)

*Colorado v. Connelly* (1986)

Essays: What role(s) for the state would Hayek's theory of freedom support? Why?

Essays: How do the opinions in *Colorado v. Connelly* (1986) illustrate the tensions between negative and positive freedom? How would you have ruled in the case, and why?

February 16th

Holiday

February 23

Positive Freedom

Read: T.H. Green, "Liberal Legislation," (handout);

Essays: Is private property truly "private"? If so, why? If not why not?

Essays: "What T.H. Green understood, Hayek did not; namely, personal liberty is dependent upon legal rights and social obligations." Discuss

Recommended Readings:

Anderson, O, "The Feminism of T.H. Green...", *History of Political Thought*, Winter 1991

Bevir, M. "Welfarism, Socialism, and Religion...", *The Review of Politics*, Fall 1993

Etzioni, A. *Rights & the Common Good*

Harris, P., "Moral Progress & Politics: The Theory of T.H. Green," *Polity*, Spring 1989

Nichols, D. "Positive Liberty: 1880-1890," *Amer. Pol. Sci. Rev.*, March 1962

Simhony, A. "What T.H. Green a Utilitarian?," *Utilitas*, May 1995

"T.H. Green: The Common Good Society," *History of Political Thought*, Summer 1993

March 2nd

The Merits of Meritocracy

Read: Young, *The Rise of Meritocracy*

Essays: Would a meritocracy create a "just" society? To achieve a "true" meritocracy what kinds of sacrifices to freedom, if any, would be required?

Recommended Readings:

William Henry III, *In Defense of Elitism*, 1994

March 9th

Freedom, Rights and "the Modern Temper"

Read: Krutch *The Modern Temper*

Essays: What does Krutch's account of modern art, modern science and modern knowledge suggest about human dignity? Does it make sense to speak of individual "freedom" and "rights" in the *modern* world?

Recommended Readings:

Cowley, *Exile's Return*, 1959

Diggins, *Up From Communism: Conservative Odyssey In American Intellectual History*, 1975

Frankel, *The Case for Modern Man*, 1955

Grey, "Modern Liberalism & Despair, The Pilgrimage of J.W. Krutch," *American Studies*, Spring 1997

Perry, "The Modern Distemper," *Saturday Review of Literature*, June 1929

Kateb, *Utopia & Its Enemies*, 1963

Margolis, *Joseph Wood Krutch: A Writer's Life*, 1980

Nash, *The Nervous Generation: American Thought, 1917-1930*, 1970

Slater, "The Negative Secularism of The Modern Temper: Joseph Wood Krutch, *American Quarterly*, Summer 1981

March 6th-20 Spring Break

March 23rd

Negative/Positive Freedom & Theology

Read: Niebuhr, *The Children of Light & The Children of Darkness*

Essays: Who are the "children of light" and who are the "children of darkness?" Do they represent heroes and villains in Niebuhr's world? Why, why not?

Essays: Niebuhr insists that "a Christian view of human nature" (which embraces positive liberty) is more appropriate than liberal optimism or modern cynicism for sustaining a democratic society. Discuss

Recommended Readings:

John Diggins, *The Promise of Pragmatism*, 1994

T.S. Eliot, "The Waste Land," *Selected Poems*

C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letter*

Oakeshott, *Religion, Politics, and the Moral Life*

March 30th

Freedom & Critical Theory

Read: Fromm, *Escape From Freedom*

Essays: There is always a villain in every political philosophy.  
Who (or what), for Fromm is the villain(s)?

Essays: Fromm, in common with other writers on the left, has  
a concept of alienation. What is it? Does it make sense  
to you?

Recommended Readings:

Birnback, *Neo-Freudian Social Philosophy*, 1961

Bartlett & Schodall, "Fromm, Marx, and the Concept of  
Alienation, *Science and Society*, Summer 1963

Kariel, "The Normative Pattern of Erich Fromm's *Escape From  
Freedom*," *Journal of Politics*, vol. 19, 1957

Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*

Schaar, *Escape From Authority: The Perspectives of Erich  
Fromm*, 1961

Wells, *The Failure of Psychoanalysis: From Freud to Fromm*,  
1963

April 6th

Fromm's Humanist Vision of Freedom

Read: Fromm, *The Sane Society*

Essays: "What is good or bad for man is not a metaphysical  
question, but an empirical one that can be answered on the  
basis of an analysis of man's nature and the effect which  
certain conditions have on him." (266 -*Escape From Freedom*)  
Comment

Essays: Is there such a thing as a "just price" or a "fair wage?"  
Would you join with Fromm in establishing a rational economic  
system?

Recommended Reading:

Briggs, "From Slaves to Robots," *New Statesman and Nation*, 23  
June 1956

Burston, *The Legacy of Erich Fromm*, 1991

Ellul, *The Political Illusion*

*The Technological Society*

H.P. "The Insane Society," *Dissent*, vol. 3, Winter 1956

Spitz, "The Appeal to the Right Man," in *Democracy and the  
Challenge of Power*, 1958

Sykes, "The Americanization of Erich Fromm," *The Hidden  
Remnant*, 1962

Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*

April 13th

*The Sane Society* cont.

Read: Fromm, *The Sane Society*— finish

Essays: What difficulties are involved in making a view of human nature the basis of a political theory?

Essays: Is there a scale of values on which reasonable people can be expected to agree, and, if there is not, what are the political consequences of they being unable to agree?

Recommended Readings:

Fromm, *Man For Himself*

*Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*

Marx, *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (see Fromm's "Introduction")

Tucker, *The Marxian Revolutionary Idea*

April 20th

Freedom, The Public and The Private

Read: Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 1-175

Essays: Arendt is critical of marxism, yet how does her indictment of modern society parallel Fromm's? Is her diagnosis of modern alienation prone to the same analytic or empirical weaknesses? Explain

Essays: Are "animal laborans" and "homo-fabor" products of history? Genes? Economic systems?

Recommended Reading:

Special Issue on Hannah Arendt, *Social Research*, 1977

Kateb, "Freedom & Worldliness in the Thought of

Hannah Arendt, " *Political Theory*, Spring 1977

Kateb, *Hannah Arendt*

Canovan, "The Contradictions of Hannah Arendt's Political Thought," *Political Theory*, February 1978

Levin, "On Animal Laborans and Homo Politicus in Arendt, *Political Theory*, November 1979

Arendt, *On Revolution*

*Between Past and Future*

*The Life of the Mind*

Pitkin, "Justice: On Relating Private and Public,"

*Political Theory*, August 1981

Wolin, *Politics and Vision*

April 27

Arendt cont.

Read: *The Human Condition*, pp. 175-325

Essays: How does Arendt's distinction between public and private relate to her distinction between work and labor. . .or does it?

Essays: How does Arendt's distinction between public and private related to her indictment of negative freedom. . .or does it?

Recommended Readings:

Young-Bruehl, "Reflections on Hannah Arendt's Life of the Mind," *Political Theory*, May 1982

Whitfield, *Into The Dark: Arendt and Totalitarianism*

Dallmayr, "Ontology of Freedom," *Political Theory*, May 1984

Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*

Raaflaub, "Democracy, Oligarchy and the Concept of the Free Citizen in Late Fifth Century Athens," *Political Theory*, November 1983

Canovan, "A Case of Distorted Communications," *Political Theory*, February 1983

May 4th

Negative & Positive Liberty Revisited

Read: Berlin, "Introduction" and "Two Concepts of Liberty"

Essays: "Berlin's defense of negative liberty leads him into the position of defending the status quo." Comment

Essays: "Absolute negative liberty, like absolute positive liberty, ends up destroying that which it prizes most— liberty."

Recommended Readings:

Crowder, G. "Negative and Positive Liberty," *Political Science*, Dec. 1988

Kristjansson, K. "What Is Wrong with Positive Liberty?," *Social Theory and Practice*, Fall 1992

Hayman, S. "Positive and Negative Liberty," *Chicago-Kent Law Review*, 1992

May 11th

Berlin cont.